



Tenderhearted by **Cindy Ryan**

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Friendship

Language: English

Characters: J. Hopper, Joyce B.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-07-26 06:24:00

Updated: 2019-07-26 06:24:00

Packaged: 2019-12-12 19:12:13

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 679

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Ficlet. AU season one. What if Hopper had found Joyce with the ax?

Tenderhearted

Title: Tenderhearted

author: Cindy Ryan

notes:AU season one

summary: What if Hopper had found Joyce with the ax?

Police Chief Jim Hopper pulled into the driveway of the Byers's home in time to see Joyce moving rapidly from the shed carrying a sharp looking ax. Jim threw down the pack of cigarettes he'd been about to pull from his pocket onto the passenger seat grabbed his hat, turned off the battered all terrian vehicle and pushed open the driver's door.

"Joyce!" Jim called as he closed the door.

Even she didn't hear him or she was ignoring him. With Joyce it could go either way. Jim cursed and ran towards the house. The front door was unlocked and it didn't take Jim long to see what Joyce was up to with the ax. She was chopping the hell out of the front wall of the living room. It was not helping his headache.

With a sigh Jim ducked a string of Christmas lights and approached the grieving mother.

"Joyce! Give me the ax!" Hopper ordered sharply.

Whack! Whack!

Shaking his head Jim grabbed Joyce around the waist and forced her to drop the ax. It clattered to the floor with a loud thump. Jim picked Joyce off her feet and she fought him like the wildcat she was. Her fists hitting his shoulders her small feet swinging.

"I have to get to Will!" Joyce protested as Jim carried her to her bedroom.

"We'll find him." Jim promised.

He wasn't sure if she heard him. She was still struggling, crying now.

"I talked to him!" Joyce continued in a sob.

Jim placed her on the bed. He was surprised when Joyce didn't spring back up onto her feet and head back to the living room. She curled in on herself still talking about her missing son. Jim pulled the comforter up over Joyce and tucked it around her shoulders wondering when the last time it was that the woman slept.

"He's scared and alone." Joyce commented tearfully.

Jim hoped somehow he'd be able to live up to his earlier promise. Right now all he wanted was to bring Will home to his broken sad mother. He knew the odds were against that; still he hoped. He knew what she was going through. The grief part of it. The piercing soul sucking pain that tore you in two and never healed.

"Get some sleep Joyce." Jim murmured as he stood. "You have another kid that needs you."

Jim wasn't sure if it was his presence or exhaustion kicking in but within a short amount of time Joyce was asleep. He took off his hat and ran a hand through his hair. Looking back at the living room Jim cursed. The house was as much of a wreck as the woman who owned it. Lonnie had done a number on this family when he left and now Will's disappearance was working on destroying what was left. He waited another minute to make sure Joyce didn't wake and be disorientated. When she didn't Jim went back to the living room.

Picking up the ax Jim went outside and put it back in the shed. He found a padlock on the work bench and when he stepped out he secured the small building. The last thing he needed right now was Joyce running around with an ax. Returning to the front door Jim found a tarp that had at one point been used to cover firewood. He went inside retrieved some of the nails from the living room table and a hammer. As quietly as he could Jim placed the tarp over the hole in the wall and pulled it tight. It was a temporary fix but it'd do. He returned to the living room and put the hammer back. Jim checked on Joyce one last time before he left. He knew happy endings for missing people stories were few and far between. The Byers deserved one.

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